# Social Media Marketing in the Localized International Contexts: Evidence from International Students' Engagement with Coffee Brand in China

**Dr Gideon Asare**
School of Public Administration
Zhejiang Gongshang University,
Hangzhou, China

asaregideon015@gmail.com

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1813-8537

## ABSTRACT

Guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this study examines how social media platforms, content, and campaign persuade international students in China purchase intention towards coffee. The study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) on survey data from 216 international students in Jiangsu, China. The findings show that while content alone does not directly drive purchase intention, platform use and campaign quality significantly increase likelihood of purchase, with campaigns exerting the strongest influence. Customer satisfaction partially mediates this relationship, while brand engagement strengthens the platform–intention link and content authenticity offers a modest positive effect. Practically, marketers should focus on platform-specific strategies, emotionally engaging campaigns, and authentic interactions to convert digital engagement into actual consumer action. The study shows how central and peripheral persuasion methods work together in a mobile-focused setting for foreigners, helping to broaden our understanding of marketing strategies from various viewpoints.

**Keywords**: Social media marketing, purchase intention, satisfaction, brand engagement

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Coffee remains one of the most widely consumed beverages across the globe, with a notable rise in the demand for specialty coffee. Modern consumers increasingly seek high-quality, artisanal experiences, fueling innovations and competition in the global coffee market. According to Statista (2025), the coffee industry generated approximately USD 457.60 billion in revenue, with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.99% between 2024 and 2029. In China, this upward trend is particularly pronounced. Over the past decade, coffee consumption has surged significantly, with major players such as Nestlé SA, Starbucks Corporation, Hainan Lisun Investment, and the rapidly growing Luckin Coffee expanding their reach beyond regional markets. By 2022, China's coffee segment reported a revenue of USD 15.34 billion, with average per capita consumption reaching 0.07 kg (Xinhua, 2024).

Despite the absence of global social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter), China's digital landscape is robust, supported by over 1.02 billion active social media users (Statista, 2025). Platforms such as Alipay, Taobao, WeChat (Weibo) serve as essential tools for communication, news, entertainment and digital commerce (Huang, 2021). This unique ecosystem has transformed the nature of consumer interaction and redefined marketing strategies in China. Emerging technologies and internet penetration have enabled firms to connect with consumers in real time, driving brand visibility and revenue. For instance, Luckin Coffee reported revenues of RMB 24.9 billion (approximately USD 3.5 billion) in 2023 (Luckin Coffee Annual Report, 2023), emphasizing the success of its digitally integrated approach. Central to its growth has been its innovative use of digital marketing and strategic deployment of social media platforms. Social media channels enable companies not only to promote products but also to create personalized and interactive experiences that enhance customer engagement (Zhao, 2020). Coffee marketers such as Starbucks, Luckin has embraced this paradigm shift, leveraging WeChat channels and moments and similar platforms to execute targeted campaigns, cultivate brand loyalty, and drive consumer interest.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which explains how individuals process persuasive information through two distinct routes: the central route and the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In digital marketing contexts, consumers who are highly involved with a brand or product are more likely to engage in central processing, carefully evaluating message content, arguments, and product quality. Conversely, consumers with lower involvement tend to rely on peripheral cues such as visual appeal, influence endorsements, or message aesthetics. Social media platforms, campaigns, and content therefore operate as key stimuli that can trigger either route of persuasion depending on user engagement, satisfaction, and perceived authenticity. Integrating ELM into this study provides a robust framework for understanding how social media marketing strategies influence purchase intentions among international students in China.

Earlier studies have documented the positive contributions of international students to China's domestic and cross-border e-commerce (Zeng et al., 2024; Kouam, 2022). Nevertheless, how do the international students engaged and benefited from this social media marketing strategies used by Chinese digital players? The study examines the impact of social media marketing on the purchase decisions of international students in China. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze how distinct elements of social media marketing (platforms, campaigns, and content) affect consumer behavior among the international student's demographic. Furthermore, the research explores the moderating role of brand engagement and perceived authenticity, and the mediating role of customer satisfaction in shaping purchase intention within Chinese digital marketing context.

Despite the extensive literature on social media marketing, existing studies have focused on mainstream consumer groups, specific platforms or generalized context with limited attention given to niche consumer groups in localized international contexts whose consumption behavior may differ significantly from that of local consumers (Allaway et al., 2017; Paliwal & Mathur, 2025; Koneti et al., 2025). Moreover, this study adopts a multidimensional approach by examining three interconnected constructs: (1) the direct influence of social media platforms, campaigns, and content; (2) the moderating role of brand engagement and perceived authenticity; and (3) the mediating function of customer satisfaction. This integrative model extends the traditional consumer behavior frameworks to account for interactive digital dynamics in a Chinese context, especially where Western platforms are largely inaccessible and domestic alternatives such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin (TikTok) dominate. Hereafter, the study presents the literature review, hypothesis development, methodology, findings, discussion and lastly the conclusion section.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### *2.1 COFFEE DIGITAL MARKET CONTEXT IN CHINA*

Coffee was introduced to China in the 1980s, with Starbucks establishing a dominant presence in the consumer market. According to Deloitte (2024), China’s coffee industry growing rapidly, and the coffee culture in China’s first and second-tier cities is the most influential and people's coffee-drinking habits are growing. In recent years, coffee culture has gained traction in China, with increasing demands for coffee in various scenarios, including work, study, relaxation, and even during long-distance drives (Peng et al., 2022). The advent of social media marketing has paved the way for various new coffee retailers, with Luckin Coffee entering the Chinese market in 2018. The coffee firms in China are rapidly expanding their customer based. For instance, in 2019, Luckin Coffee opened over 4,500 stores, becoming a major player in the coffee market (Zeng et al., 2024). In the third quarter of 2024, Luckin Coffee boost to 7501 and 2341 self-operated and partnership stores.

Currently, there are several self-operated coffee machines at advantageous points in the university campuses, sometimes close to lecture halls, campus malls, library and hostels. This digital and self-operated machine makes it possible to order for coffee at any time. The coffee firms have devised strategies for discount, combination of other items at the consumer desired quantity and kind of coffee. In relation to coffee marketing strategy, Qiu (2020) found that coffee marketers’ main strategy for acquiring consumers fully utilizes the customer social network and extends an invitation to potential customers to enjoy a cup of coffee. Cheng (2022) provided a summary of the effectiveness of advertising based on Masoumeh Fardi’s 2021 research. They suggest that the impact of advertising was broken down into two categories. Thus, one is altering consumers' perceptions of the brand and changing consumer behavior. The art of changing consumer purchase intention is founded in several strategies. This means that what worked for Chinese students might not work for international students in Ghana. For instance, many social media content creators create short, visually appealing, emotionally charged content, such as memes, giveaways, and influencer “shout-outs”. Example, Weibo Mini Program, TikTok video with a catchy jingle promoting a snack brand that goes viral due to its humor rather than the nutritional value of the product. Cheng (2022) after carrying out research on the university consumer group on Luckin Coffee advertisement established that university students have positive attitudes toward Luckin Coffee’s promotion, products, and services in general. The literature suggests that coffee firms marketing strategies, which include the content, campaign message and the marketing platform, influence consumers at the coffee stand.

### *2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AS A MARKETING STRATEGY*

Social media platforms have become the most influential and popular media for communicating to the worldwide and even people within the same communities (Sudirman, 2020). The exponential growth of social media platform marketing over the past decade has been well-documented. A bibliometric analysis of 1,198 articles from 2013 to 2023 reveals that the number of studies on social media marketing have increased significantly, reflecting its growing importance in the digital economy (Shrewish & Alsharif, 2024). This growth is attributed to the ability of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube to facilitate advertising, customer interaction, and sales, while fostering connections with target audiences (Khraiwish & Alsharif, 2024; Revathi et al., 2024). The emergence of social media platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp and Weibo (WeChat) moments or status has further expanded the scope of social media platform marketing, offering new opportunities for businesses to engage with younger demographics through short-form video content (Zhang, 2024). These platforms have become central to digital marketing strategies, enabling companies to deploy creative campaigns and build emotional bonds with consumers (Rojas-Hermida et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains how individuals process persuasive information through two distinct routes: the central route and the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In digital marketing contexts, consumers who are highly involved with a brand or product are more likely to engage in central processing, carefully evaluating message content, arguments, and product quality. Conversely, consumers with lower involvement tend to rely on peripheral cues such as visual appeal, influence endorsements, or message aesthetics. Social media platforms, campaigns, and content therefore operate as key stimuli that can trigger either route of persuasion depending on user engagement, satisfaction, and perceived authenticity.

According to Shaffer & Garrett (2011), social media platforms are the medium of advertising and way organizations communicate their presence and products faster. Cao (2022) asserted that social media marketing can be conducted in many applications such as Instagram, YouTube, twitters (X), Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, Snapchat or special platforms like Shopee, Amazon, Lazada, Taobao, Weibo, etc. Today, social media platforms have undoubtedly become the largest commercial avenue to display products and services to the world. Major coffee firms have accounts or pages where they create and share content or participate in social networking to engage consumers. Revathi et al. (2024) opined that each platform has unique features for connecting people, posting content, engaging followers, and running advertisements. The features allow sharing image, video, message, linking or informing consumers what the coffee firm has to offer. Zhao (2020) found that the better social media platform, the higher the buying interest, the better brand awareness is built, where the higher the buying interest generated in the minds of consumers, the higher the level of purchasing the product or service. For this reason, firms may take deliberate effort to create an account or advertise with influencers or streamers on social media platforms. According to Revathi et al. (2024), social media platforms like TikTok have led to rise of influencer marketing which indirectly increases purchase intentions. Several research have established that social media platforms have significantly and positively affect purchase decisions (Duffett, 2015; Revathi et al., 2024). This study positions that international students in China are likely to be influenced to purchase coffee based on the platform they are engaged in.

**H1: Social media platform positively influence international students in China intention to purchase coffee.**

### 2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

This study made a distinction between the social media platforms and referred to social media content as the actual posts, visuals, videos, messages, or graphics that are shared on social media platforms. The content comes in several forms like text posts, images and infographics, videos (short-form like reels or long-form like YouTube videos), stories (e.g., Instagram or Facebook stories), polls, quizzes, memes, etc. According to Rojas-Hermida et al. (2024), the content is what firms used to communicate message, engage, entertain, inform, or persuade followers. A growing body of literature suggests that user-generated content (UGC) plays a crucial role in shaping a brand's identity and purchase intention (Rojas-Hermida et al., 2024; Zhao, 2020; Kouam, 2022). According to Suparto (2024), UGC can either reinforce or contradict a brand's intended identity, affecting consumer perceptions. The interactive nature of social media allows consumers to share their experiences, which often leads to brand co-creation. The brand co-creation creates a brand and message or content for new users to make purchase decisions. In most cases, international students in China relied on referrals and comment section of the firms or sellers to make decision. The content, which includes the item or service parts, usage procedure, benefits, durability and authenticity messages form significant part of the buyer decision-making. Furthermore, Suparto (2024) found that emotionally engaging content, such as storytelling and relatable brand narratives, has a direct positive impact on customer satisfaction and retention. Zhang (2024) argued that consistent use of contents that are positive, engaging and persuasive across social media platforms enhance brand recognition and identity and purchase intentions. Suparto and Zhang results showed that content that is personalized and matches the audience's interests has a higher success rate in increasing brand awareness and purchase intention.

**H2: Social media content positively influences international students in China intention to purchase coffee.**

### 2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

The social media platform and content are different from the social media campaign. The social media campaign is the coordinated marketing effort or strategy carried out on one or more social media platforms through its content to achieve a specific goal (Kouam, 2022). In general, the social media campaign is usually time-bound (usually has a start and end date), goal-oriented (product launch, awareness drive, contest), includes multiple pieces of content across platforms and it may take a paid promotion and performance tracking. Zhang et al. (2024) suggested that a back-to-school promo by a bookstore that runs for a period on Facebook and Instagram using ads, videos, and discount codes is the campaign strategy. Scholars have argued that social media campaigns have profound positive impact on purchase intention. For instance, Du et al. (2020) established that a positive campaign can positively influence the customers repurchase intentions. Yang et al. (2022) suggest that active social media campaign build strong relational bonds between customers and brands, which can lead to improved retention rates. The researcher therefore proposes that.

**H3: Social media campaign positively influences purchase intention.**

The researcher distinguishes among social media platforms, content and campaigns as marketing strategies in Table 1. In some marketing literature reviews, the terms have been interchangeable. This makes it a little difficult to establish whether the platform, message content or campaign strategy is having profound impact on the consumers purchase intention.

**TABLE 1: DIFFERENCES AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, CONTENT AND CAMPAIGN**

| Term | What It Is | Key Focus | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Social Media Platform** | The tool or app where content is shared | The digital environment | TikTok, X, Facebook, WeChat, Instagram |
| **Social Media Content** | Message or media being posted | The message itself | A Facebook Reel showing a product |
| **Social Media Campaign** | A coordinated series of posts/actions | A goal-driven strategy using content | A "Buy One, Get One Free" promo across Instagram and Twitter |

### *2.4 BRAND ENGAGEMENT AS A MODERATOR*

Brand engagement has been widely recognized as a critical factor that strengthens the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies. It reflects the degree to which consumers cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally invest in brand-related interactions (Kumar et al., 2016). Highly engaged consumers are more likely to actively interact with brand content, participate in online communities, and develop stronger brand relationships. As a result, they tend to respond more positively to social media campaigns. Empirical evidence supports this assertion. For instance, Khan (2022) found that social media marketing activities have a significantly stronger impact on brand experience and subsequent purchase intention among highly engaged consumers compared to those with low engagement. Similarly, Hollebeek et al. (2014) emphasize that customer brand engagement enhances the effectiveness of marketing communications by fostering deeper psychological connections with the brand. In the context of integrated marketing communication (IMC), social media serves as a key platform where engagement drives message amplification and persuasion (Sudiman, 2020). Based on this reasoning, it is expected that the influence of social media platform use on purchase intention will be stronger for consumers with higher levels of brand engagement.

**H4: Brand engagement moderates the relationship between social media platform use and purchase intention.**

### *2.5 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AS A MEDIATOR*

Customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer responses to marketing activities. It represents a consumer's overall evaluation of their experience with a product or service (Oliver, 2014). In social media contexts, satisfied customers are more likely to interpret brand communications positively, leading to stronger behavioral outcomes such as repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth. Research indicates that social media campaigns can enhance customer satisfaction by improving communication, responsiveness, and perceived value (Cao et al., 2022). In turn, satisfaction has been shown to directly influence purchase intention and customer loyalty (Kothari et al., 2025). This suggests a mediating mechanism where social media campaigns first shape customer satisfaction, which then drives purchase decisions. While limited studies have explicitly tested satisfaction as a mediator in social media environments (Suparto, 2024), broader marketing literature consistently confirms its central role in linking marketing efforts to consumer behavior. Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that customer satisfaction transmits the effect of social media campaigns on purchase intention.

**H5: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between social media campaigns and purchase intention.**

### 2.6 PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY AS A MODERATOR

Perceived authenticity has emerged as a key determinant of consumer responses in digital marketing environments. It refers to the extent to which consumers perceive brand communications as genuine, transparent, and trustworthy. In social media settings, authenticity is particularly important due to the prevalence of user-generated content, influencer marketing, and interactive communication. Studies have shown that authentic social media content enhances trust, emotional connection, and brand credibility, all of which contribute to higher purchase intention (Kothari et al., 2025). Similarly, De Veirman et al. (2017) found that consumers are more likely to engage with and be influenced by content that appears sincere and relatable, rather than overly commercialized or staged messages. Lou and Yuan (2019) further highlight that authenticity in influencer marketing significantly strengthens persuasion and consumer trust.

Drawing on these insights, perceived authenticity is expected to strengthen the effectiveness of social media content in influencing purchase intention. When consumers perceive content as authentic, they are more likely to process the message positively and act on it.

**H6: Perceived authenticity moderates the relationship between social media content and purchase intention.**

### 2.7 STUDY FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION OF ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL

This study draws on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to conceptualize how social media marketing strategies influence purchase behavior among international students in China, focusing on Luckin Coffee. This integrated framework offers a novel application of ELM in a cross-cultural digital context and contributes to understanding consumer responses in localized, platform-specific marketing environments like China's. ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) distinguishes between two cognitive processing routes (central and peripheral) offering a robust framework to understand how consumers engage with persuasive digital content. In the central route, consumers actively process detailed information (social media content) such as product reviews, educational content, and promotional messages, leading to informed purchasing decisions. In contrast, the peripheral route involves heuristic processing based (social media campaigns) on surface cues like influencer endorsements, visual appeal, and social proof. Luckin Coffee leverages both pathways through its dual-focused social media strategy that combines data-driven campaigns with emotionally engaging content. Figure 1 presents the study framework that integrates key constructions such as brand engagement and customer satisfaction to capture moderation and mediating influences in the consumer decision journey. Brand engagement reflects the emotional and behavioral involvement that strengthens purchase intention, while customer satisfaction serves as a mediator that enhances loyalty and repeat purchases.

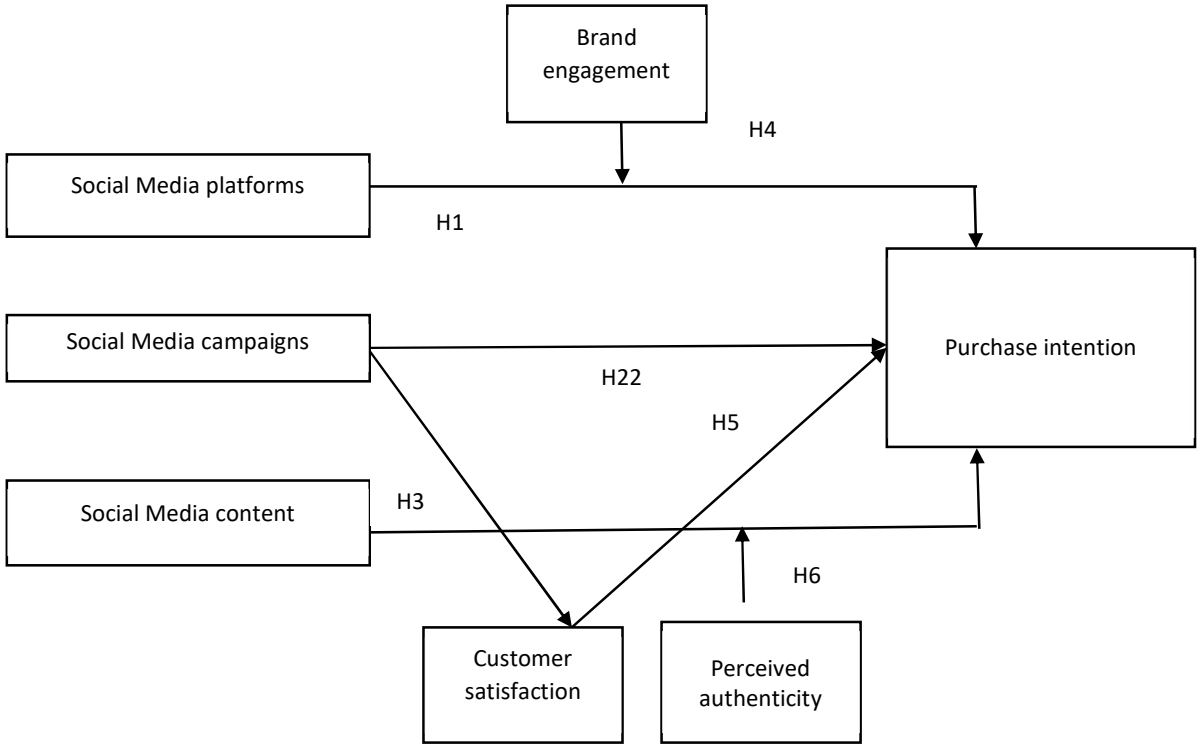


**FIGURE 1. RESEARCH MODEL**

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### *3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN*

To achieve the research objective, a research model was developed, which is in Fig 1. The study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of social media marketing on consumer behavior among international students in Jiangsu Province-China. This approach was adopted to allow for empirical testing of hypotheses and to establish statistically supported relationships between variables. The study collected data from 216 participants in Jiangsu Province through online survey via Google Form. Statistical analysis was conducted using statistical package for social science (SPSS, v27) and analysis of moment structure (AMOS) to perform descriptive and inferential tests, including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) correlations and structural equation modeling (SEM).

### *3.2 PARTICIPANTS*

This study employed simple random, cross-sectional survey design to collect primary data from international students residing in Jiangsu Province, China. A total of 216 valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis. The sample size is considered adequate for multivariate inferential analysis, particularly in studies with well-specified constructs and theoretically grounded measurement models (Krejcie &Morgan et al., 2010). Moreover, international students represent an information – rich population for examining digitally mediated consumption behaviours, given their high reliance on mobile applications and social media platforms for everyday purchases in a host-country context.

### 3.3 INSTRUMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Online survey administration was deemed appropriate due to its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ability to reach geographically dispersed respondents within a limited period (Duong et al., 2024). The questionnaire was distributed through WeChat and WhatsApp-platforms widely used among international students in China – 25 November and 20 December 2025. The survey instrument consisted of two main sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic and contextual characteristics, including age, gender, length of residence in China, geographic location within Jiangsu Province, and frequency of purchasing coffee-related products or services via mobile applications or social media platforms. Section B measured the study's core latent constructs: social media platforms, social media content, social media campaigns, brand engagement, perceived authenticity, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention.

The study measured key constructs using adapted items from established literature. Sample of the questionnaire items and their sources are depicted in Table 2. Social media platform usage was assessed through students' frequency of interaction and engagement with platforms such as WeChat/Weibo, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X, drawing on Cheng (2022). Social media campaigns were operationalized based on perceptions of promotional clarity, interactivity, and the appeal of brand-driven events (Qiu, 2020). Social media content was measured by the perceived attractiveness and information of visual and textual media, following Qiu (2020) validated measurement items. Brand engagement was captured through user interactions such as likes, shares, comments, and emotional connection with the brand, based on Kloter and Armstrong (2012). Perceived authenticity examined consumers' perceptions of the brand's honesty, originality, and relatability in its online presence. Customer satisfaction and purchase intention were measured through indicators such as product satisfaction, repeat purchase likelihood, and brand recommendation, also adapted from Kloter and Armstrong (2012).

**TABLE 2. MEASUREMENT OF CONSTRUCTS**

| Constructs | Sample items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| **Social media platforms** | Luckin Coffee's presence on social media platforms influences my perception of its brand.<br>I frequently engage with Luckin Coffee on social media platforms (e.g., likes, comments, shares). | Cheng, 2022 |
| **Social media campaigns** | Luckin Coffee's social media campaigns influenced my decision to try new products.<br>I am more likely to purchase from Luckin Coffee after seeing a campaign on social media. | Jeon & An, 2019 |
| **Social media content** | Luckin Coffee's social media content is creative and engaging.<br>The social media content shared by Luckin Coffee influences my purchasing decisions. | Qiu (2020 |
| **Brand engagement** | I frequently engage with Luckin Coffee on social media (e.g., likes, comments, shares).<br>I feel more connected to Luckin Coffee through their social media presence. | Kloter & Amstrong, 2012 |
| **Perceived authenticity** | Luckin Coffee's social media posts seem honest and transparent.<br>The information shared by Luckin Coffee on social media is trustworthy. | |
| **Customer satisfaction** | I am satisfied with Luckin Coffee's responses to inquiries on social media.<br>My overall satisfaction with Luckin Coffee has improved due to their social media presence. | Kloter & Amstrong, 2012 |
| **Purchase intention** | I will buy a product from Luckin Coffee because of their Social marketing.<br>I will urge my friends and relatives to patronize Luckin Coffee | Wang et al., 2023 |

Several procedural steps were implemented to enhance data quality and integrity. The Google Forms settings ensured respondent anonymity, prevent multiple submissions from the same user, and required completion of all questionnaire items before submission. These measures reduced the risks of common method biases associated with missing data and duplicate responses (Hair et al., 2010). In line with best practices for purposive

sampling, eligibility criteria were embedded within the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate their country of origin, university affiliation, and a recognizable landmark from their home country to verify their international student status. Additionally, a screening question - "In the last four months, have ever ordered a coffee product or service in China?"- was used to ensure that only participant with recent and relevant digital consumption experience were included in the final sample. Only respondents who provided affirmative responses progressed to the survey, thereby strengthening the construct validity and relevance of the data.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the data collection process. An introductory statement clearly outlined the purpose of the study, assured respondents of confidentiality and anonymity, and emphasized their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were given sufficient time to complete the survey at their convenience. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were solely for academic research purposes. Overall, the combination for purposive sampling, screening procedures, and ethically grounded data collection practices enhanced the robustness and credibility of the database used in the study.

# 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

## *4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION*

Table 3 provides information based on gender, age, region of origin, and years spent in China by the respondent. The gender distribution shows 150 males accounting for 69.4% of the respondents, while 66 females represent 30.6%. Many of the participants are between the ages of 25 and 29 years (32.4%), followed by those aged 30 to 34 years (25.5%). The largest group of respondents originates from Africa (59.3%), followed by Asia excluding China (22.2%), Europe (11.1%), and South America (7.4%). Lack of representation from North America or other regions does not indicate bias but reflects a true composition of the accessible population. The study found that many of the respondents have had significant exposure to life in China, which could influence their level of integration and familiarity with local practices.

**TABLE 3. RESPONDENTS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION (N= 216)**

| Category | Variable | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 150 | 69.4 |
| | Female | 66 | 30.6 |
| **Age** | 18-24 years | 49 | 22.7 |
| | 25-29 years | 70 | 32.4 |
| | 30-34 years | 55 | 25.5 |
| | 35 and above | 42 | 19.4 |
| **Region** | Africa | 128 | 59.3 |
| | Europe | 24 | 11.1 |
| | South America | 16 | 7.4 |
| | Asia excluding China | 48 | 22.2 |
| **Years in China** | Less than 1 year | 27 | 12.5 |
| | 1–2 years | 66 | 30.6 |
| | 3–4 years | 53 | 24.5 |
| | 5 years or more | 70 | 32.4 |

### *4.2 MEASUREMENT MODEL ASSESSMENT*

Table 4 presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) used to assess the measurement model's psychometric properties. Each construct was evaluated for factor loadings, mean scores, standard deviation (SD), Cronbach's alpha (α), average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) to ensure reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010; Wang, 2017). All items exhibit strong standardized factor loadings, ranging from .639 to .942, exceeding the acceptable threshold of .60, thus supporting unidimensionality across constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .819 to .943, with most constructs exceeding .90, indicating excellent internal consistency. The AVE values for all constructs were above the .50 benchmark, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). The CR scores also surpassed the .70 minimum requirement, further reinforcing the internal coherence of the latent variables. Among all constructs, Perceived Authenticity had the highest average mean (3.76), suggesting a strong positive perception among participants, followed closely by Social Media Content and Purchase intention. In contrast, Brand Engagement recorded the lowest mean (3.42). Overall, the results affirm that the measurement model is suitable for structural equation modeling (SEM).

**TABLE 4. CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS**

| Code/Variable | Factor loading | Extraction | Mean | SD | Reliability (α) | AVE 0.5 | CR > 0.7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Social Media Platforms** | | | 3.45 | | | | |
| MP1 | .871 | .746 | 3.41 | 1.34 | | | |
| MP2 | .826 | .642 | 3.19 | 1.07 | .927 | 0.736 | 0.933 |
| MP3 | .909 | .858 | 3.58 | 1.05 | | | |
| MP4 | .760 | .530 | 3.45 | 1.09 | | | |
| MP5 | .915 | .869 | 3.61 | 1.15 | | | |
| **Social Media Campaigns** | | | 3.56 | | | | |
| MC1 | .841 | .664 | 3.46 | 1.03 | | | |
| MC2 | .703 | .504 | 3.67 | 0.91 | .912 | 0.689 | 0.917 |
| MC3 | .868. | .774 | 3.60 | 0.87 | | | |
| MC4 | .91 | .863 | 3.64 | 0.88 | | | |
| MC5 | .809 | .627 | 3.45 | 0.98 | | | |
| **Social Media Content** | | | 3.67 | | | | |
| CT1 | .782 | .543 | 3.67 | 1.05 | | | |
| CT2 | .804 | .642 | 3.52 | 1.00 | .897 | 0.647 | 0.901 |
| CT3 | .710 | .473 | 3.74 | 0.77 | | | |
| CT4 | .834 | .755 | 3.70 | 0.85 | | | |
| CT5 | .881 | .799 | 3.75 | 0.89 | | | |
| **Brand Engagement** | | | 3.42 | | | | |
| BE1 | .737 | .592 | 3.12 | 1.23 | | | |
| BE2 | .816 | .734 | 3.42 | 1.11 | .918 | 0.698 | 0.920 |
| BE3 | .870 | .817 | 3.35 | 1.03 | | | |
| BE4 | .860 | .646 | 3.72 | 0.92 | | | |
| BE5 | .887 | .734 | 3.47 | 1.03 | | | |

| Code/Variable | | Factor loading | Extraction | Mean | SD | Reliability (α) | AVE 0.5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Perceived Authenticity** | | | 3.76 | | | | |
| PA1 | .843 | .712 | 3.81 | 0.86 | | | |
| PA2 | .913 | .822 | 3.71 | 0.86 | | | |
| PA3 | .942 | .903 | 3.76 | 0.84 | .943 | 0.774 | 0.920 |
| PA4 | .875 | .766 | 3.85 | 0.80 | | | |
| PA5 | .821 | .661 | 3.65 | 0.87 | | | |
| **Customer Satisfaction** | | | 3.62 | | | | |
| SF1 | .872 | .662 | 3.62 | 0.87 | | | |
| SF2 | .872 | .613 | 3.63 | 0.72 | | | |
| SF3 | .908 | .930 | 3.64 | 0.73 | .928 | 0.748 | 0.937 |
| SF4 | .901 | .929 | 3.61 | 0.75 | | | |
| SF5 | .765 | .488 | 3.58 | 0.97 | | | |
| **Purchase intention** | | | 3.67 | | | | |
| PH1 | .863 | .734 | 4.02 | 0.72 | | | |
| PH2 | .656 | .133 | 3.33 | 0.85 | | | |
| PH3 | .789 | .645 | 3.62 | 0.80 | .819 | 0.510 | 0.829 |
| PH4 | .804 | .643 | 3.88 | 0.72 | | | |
| PH5 | .639 | .394 | 3.47 | 1.09 | | | |

### *4.3 GOODNESS-OF-FIT TEST*

The SEM structural model test requires excellent fitness of index of the measurement model. According to Hair et al. (2010), convergent validity is obtained when all the measuring items are statistically significant. The results of the measurement indices were presented in Table 5. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.069 indicates a good fit. Since the obtained value is 0.069, this suggests that the model fits well, reflecting an acceptable approximation error in the population. The normed fit index (NFI) compares the fit of the model against a null model. The obtained value of 0.921, which exceeds the benchmark of 0.90, indicates a good fit. Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) adjusts for model complexity, and a value greater than 0.90 indicates a good fit. With an obtained value of 0.902, the model demonstrates a reasonable balance between goodness of fitness and complexity. The Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) assesses the overall fit of the model. The obtained value meets the benchmark of 0.90, confirming the model has a good fit, like comparative fit index (CFI). The covariance among variables is illustrated in Figure 2.

**TABLE 5. MEASUREMENT OF GOODNESS-OF-FIT INDICES**

| Measurement | Benchmark | Obtained | Outcome | Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chi-square** | <3 | 15 | Overlooked, sample size >200 | Joreskog and Sorbom 1996 |
| **RMSEA** | < 0.08 | 0.069 | Good fit | Browne and Cudeck (1993) |
| **NFI** | > 0.90 | 0.921 | Good fit | Bentler (1990) |
| **AGFI** | > 0.90 | 0.902 | Good fit | Tanaka and Huba (1985) |
| **GFI** | ≥ 0.90 | 0.90 | Good fit | Joreskog and Sorbom 1996 |
| **CFI** | ≥ 0.95 | 0.950 | Good fit | Bentler (1990) |

Statistically Good Fit, P value = .000 Bentler (1990), Hair et al. 2010

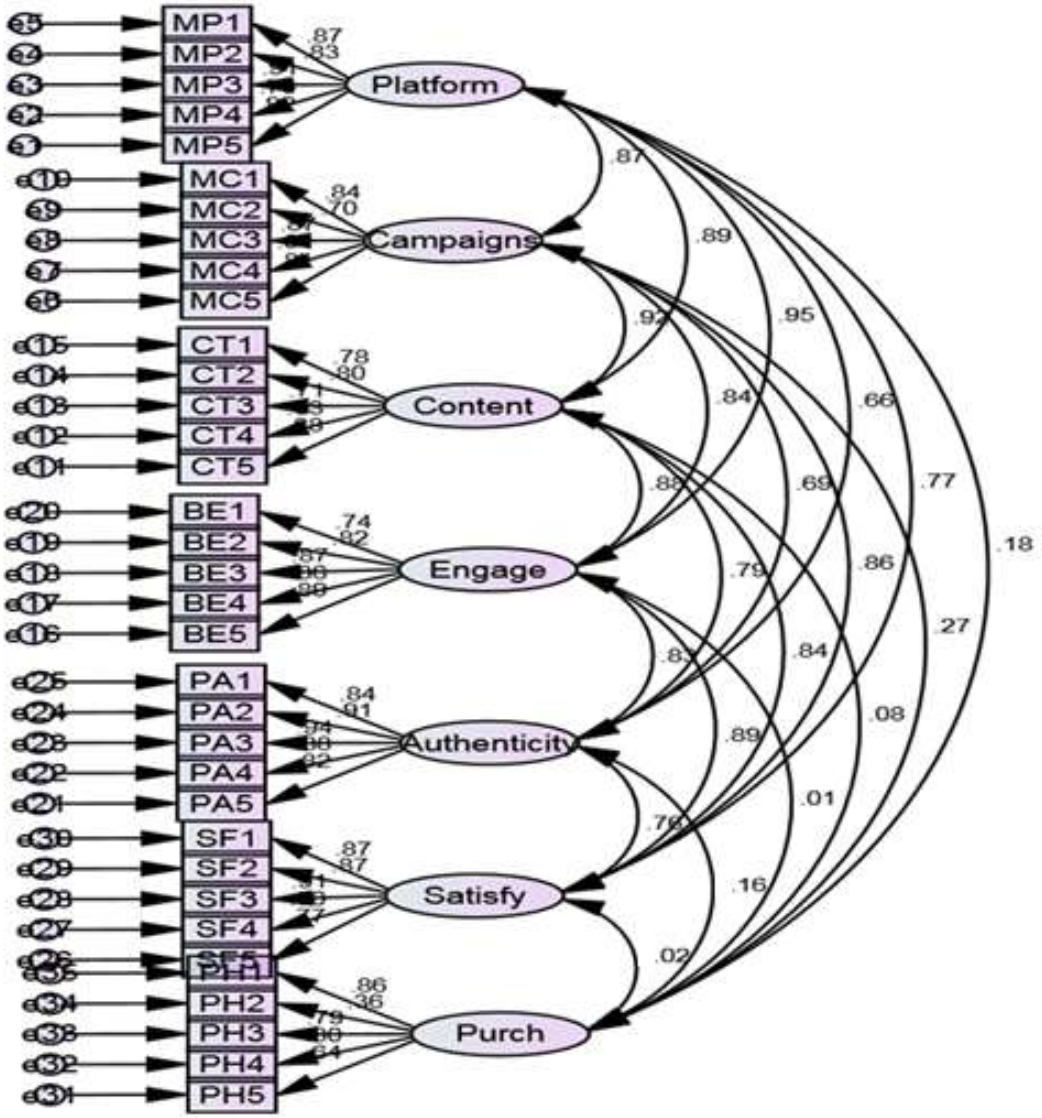


**FIGURE 2. MEASUREMENT MODEL**

### *4.4 DIRECT RELATIONSHIPS AMONG VARIABLES*

After passing the necessary fitness tests, the study first examines direct relationships among the variables using correlational matrix. Table 6 presents the inter-construct correlation matrix for the latent variables assessed in the structural model in Figure 3, reflecting the strength and direction of relationships between key dimensions of social media marketing and consumer behavior. The results reveal high positive correlations among most constructs, notably between Content and Campaigns (r = .95), Content and Platform (r = .92), and Engage and Content (r = .89), suggesting that content quality and campaign effectiveness are closely linked and jointly influence user engagement. The construct Authenticity shows strong correlations with Satisfy (r = .89) and Engage (r = .80), supporting its central role in shaping satisfaction and user interaction. Interestingly, Purchase behavior shows only weak correlations with all other variables (ranging from .01 to .18), indicating that while social media dimensions are highly interrelated, their direct influence on purchase intention may be more complex or mediated by other factors.

**TABLE 6. CORRELATION MATRIX OF LATENT CONSTRUCTS**

| Constructs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Platform** | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| **Campaigns** | .87** | 1.00 | | | | | |
| **Content** | .92** | .95** | 1.00 | | | | |
| **Engage** | .82** | .88** | .89** | 1.00 | | | |
| **Authenticity** | .83** | .84** | .84* | .80** | 1.00 | | |
| **Satisfy** | .76** | .78** | .79* | .69** | .89** | 1.00 | |
| **Purchase** | .02** | .16* | .01** | .18** | .08** | .02* | 1.00 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Secondly, the study examines the direct relationship among the variables in the SEM structural model. Table 7 established that use of social media platforms has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention (β=0.260, p<0.001). The estimate of 0.260 indicates that the more effective the use of social media platforms, the higher the likelihood of a purchase. This is a strong and statistically significant relationship. The social media campaign has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (β=0.564, p<0.001). This is a strong effect, supported by the high critical ratio (6.830) and significant p-value. Also, the research discovered a positive association between satisfaction and purchase intention (β=0.339, p<0.001). The study establishes positive and significant association between international students' purchase intention and perceived authenticity, customer satisfaction and brand engagement. Moreover, social media content does not have a statistically significant impact on purchase intention, as the p-value is greater than 0.05.

**TABLE 7. REGRESSION WEIGHTS: (GROUP NUMBER 1 - DEFAULT MODEL)**

| | Regression paths | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P | Label |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Satisfaction** | <--- | SM_Campaign | .538 | .033 | 22.938 | *** | par_3 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | Authentic | .253 | .047 | 5.414 | *** | par_1 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | SM_Content | .046 | .046 | .994 | .320 | par_2 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | Satisfaction | .339 | .093 | 3.661 | *** | par_4 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | SM_platforms | .260 | .036 | 7.314 | *** | par_5 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | Engagement | .226 | .039 | 5.859 | *** | par_6 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | SM_Campaign | .564 | .083 | 6.830 | *** | par_7 |

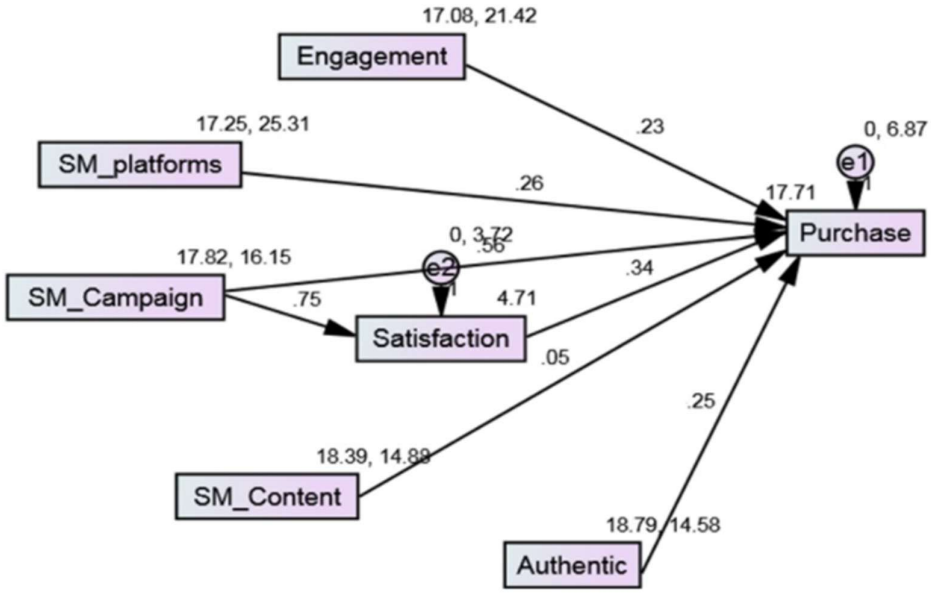


**FIGURE 3. STRUCTURAL MODEL DIAGRAM**

### *4.5 MEDIATION ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION*

Table 8 provides the mediation results of how a social media (SM) campaign affects purchase intention through customer satisfaction. The direct and indirect effects of the social media campaign on purchase intention are statistically significant (β = 0.538, p < 0.01; β = 0.213, p < 0.05.). The total effect of the SM campaign on purchase intention is statistically significant (β = 0.751, P < 0.001), indicating the overall impact (both direct and indirect) of the SM campaign on purchase intention is strong. The results support the idea that the SM campaign has both a direct and indirect effect on purchase intention. Therefore, the mediation effect of customer satisfaction of Luckin Coffee's social media campaigns is *supported.*

**TABLE 8. MEDIATION EFFECTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

| Path | Direct effects | Indirect effects | Total effects | Confidence Interval | | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| **SM Campaign>Satisfaction>purchase intention** | 0.538** | 0.213* | 0.751** | 0.115 | 0.372 | Supported |

***p<0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

### *4.6 MODERATION ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY AND BRAND ENGAGEMENT*

Figure 4 and Table 9 show the results of a moderation analysis, where the interaction terms (platform_engage and Content_authentic) affect the relationship between independent variables and purchase intention.

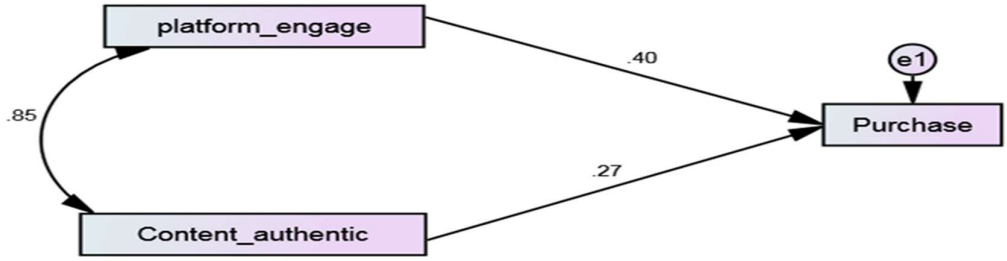


**FIGURE 4. MODERATION EFFECTS OF AUTHENTICITY AND ENGAGEMENT**

The moderation analysis reveals two statistically significant interaction effects on purchase intention. First, social media platforms and brand engagement significantly moderates the relationship, with a positive estimate (β = 0.008, *p* = .001; C.R. = 3.189), indicating that higher engagement with social media platforms enhances the influence of marketing efforts on consumers' purchase intentions. Second, the interaction between content and authenticity also demonstrates a significant but smaller positive moderating effect (β = 0.006, *p* = .029).

**TABLE 9 REGRESSION WEIGHTS: (GROUP NUMBER 1 - DEFAULT MODEL)**

| Relationships | | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Purchase** | <--- | platform_engage | .008 | .003 | 3.189 | .001 |
| **Purchase** | <--- | Content_authentic | .006 | .003 | 2.177 | .029 |

In Figure 5, the study established that when brand engagement is low, increasing usage of social media platforms by international students (from low to high) results in only a slight increase in purchase intention.

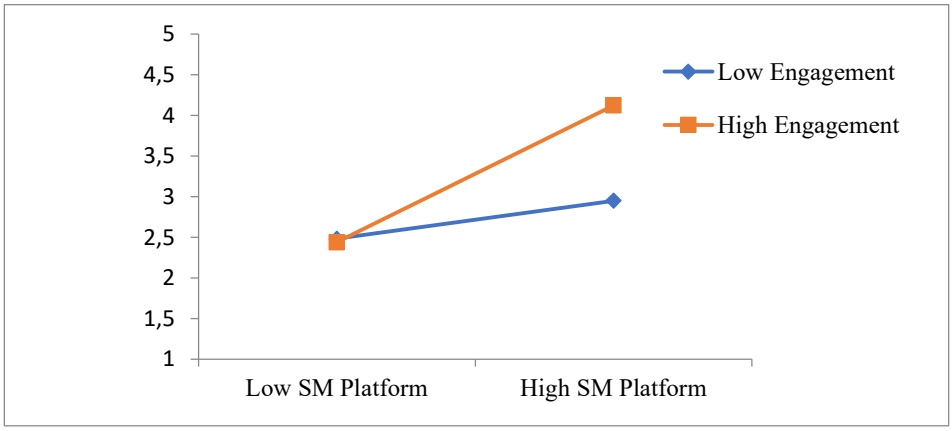


**FIGURE 5 MODERATION EFFECT OF BRAND ENGAGEMENT**

In Figure 6, when authenticity is low, increasing social media content from low to high does not cause any significant change in purchase intention. When authenticity is high, an increase in social media content from low to high leads to a significant rise in purchase intention.

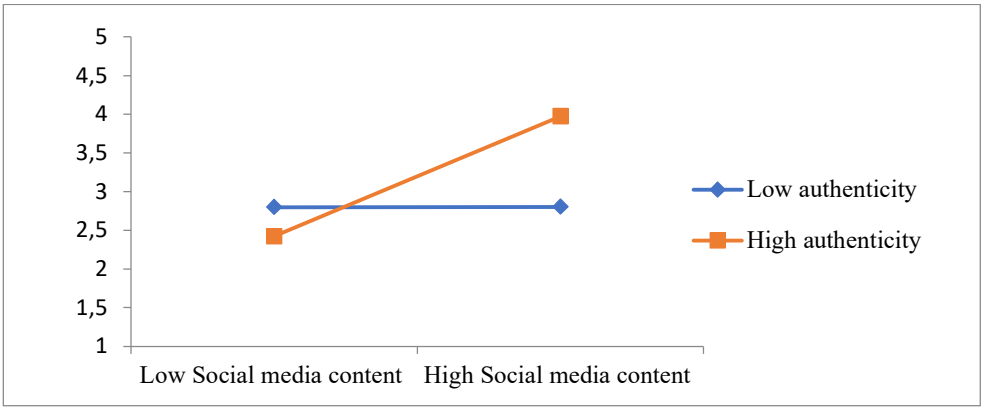


**FIGURE 6. MODERATION EFFECT OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY**

## 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### *5.1 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND CAMPAIGNS AS CENTRAL CUES IN PURCHASE DECISION-MAKING*

The findings reveal that social media platforms and campaigns exert a strong and statistically significant influence on purchase intention. This suggests that beyond mere exposure, platform characteristics such as interface design, ease of use, and interactivity play a central role in shaping consumer attitudes. These features function as central cues in the ELM framework (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), engaging consumers in deliberate message processing when trust and ability are high. The role of social media campaigns further reinforces the importance of content depth and personal relevance. This notion is also supported by Lim and Rasul (2022), who found that social media interactions can build trust between consumers and brands, which ultimately leads to increased sales. Targeted campaigns, especially those with tailored messages and localized appeals, activate deeper cognitive engagement, encouraging consumers to assess information critically before forming purchase intentions. This echoes insights from Duffett (2020), who emphasize that high-quality, informative, and emotionally resonant campaigns stimulate thoughtful decision-making processes, especially when coupled with satisfaction-inducing user experiences. The strategic alignment between platform quality and campaign structure thus operates synergistically, creating an ecosystem in which persuasive communication thrives. Such a mechanism is particularly potent in China's mobile-first digital environment, where users expect seamless, culturally attuned, and visually immersive experiences. These findings advance empirical weight to call for integrated platform-content strategies that go beyond superficial engagement metrics to foster meaningful consumer-brand interactions.

### *5.2 BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND AUTHENTICITY: DUAL ROUTES OF PERSUASION*

The findings show that platform_engagement significantly moderates the relationship between social media activity and purchase intention, suggesting that user involvement heightens sensitivity to persuasive cues. This aligns with Hollebeek et al. (2021), who argue that brand engagement not only enhances attitudinal commitment but also drives behavior through increased message elaboration and psychological investment in the brand. Simultaneously, content authenticity (the perception that brand messages are genuine, transparent, and value-driven) also exerts a positive moderating effect. Authentic content may act as a heuristic shortcut in the peripheral route, facilitating trust and affective resonance. Prior studies have established that perceived sincerity in messaging helps bridge emotional gaps in digital communication, enabling consumers to bypass rational scrutiny while still arriving at favorable purchase intentions (Onofrei et al., 2022; Audrezet et al., 2018). Together, these moderators illustrate how coffee

brands can engage both cognitive and affective pathways to persuasion. When consumers are both engaged and emotionally aligned with authentic messaging, the conditions for persuasive success, regardless of route, are optimized. In today's digital era, this study discovers the exploration of brand engagement and content authenticity as factors that amplify or attenuate the influence of marketing stimuli on purchase behavior. Here, ELM offers a robust interpretive framework. Consumers with high brand engagement levels are more likely to be cognitively involved, evaluating content through the central route. In contrast, low-engagement users may rely on peripheral cues, such as visual appeal or influence credibility, to guide decisions.

### *5.3 WHY CONTENT ALONE FAILS TO DRIVE PURCHASE INTENTIONS*

A particularly revealing aspect of this study is the non-significant direct effect of social media content on purchase intention, which runs counter to much of the conventional wisdom in digital marketing literature. This finding suggests that content, in isolation, may not exert sufficient persuasive force in today's oversaturated media landscape. As Rojas-Hermida et al. (2024) caution, consumers often experience "content fatigue," where excessive or generic brand messaging dilutes impact and erodes attention. Consistent with De Vries et al. (2023), the findings affirm that content quality, emotional tone, and informational depth (not just frequency) are decisive in shaping outcomes. They concluded that frequent posting may boost visibility, it does not necessarily convert interest into intent unless coupled with personalization and relevance. Kim and Ko (2012) further emphasize that authenticity rather than sheer volume drives favorable brand evaluations and consumer trust.

In contrast, studies like Ansari and Khan, (2020) argue for the continued importance of content as a brand knowledge mechanism. However, this research contends that content effectiveness is highly contextual, it depends on platform, audience characteristics, and the degree of user involvement. Tafesse and Wien (2018) also note that user-generated content and dialogic engagement significantly outperform one-way brand messaging in stimulating purchase behavior.

The implication is clear: content must be embedded within a relational, interactive, and authentic framework to yield returns. This finding provides a timely corrective to content-saturation strategies and urges marketers to prioritize substance over scale.

### *5.4 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS*

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by extending its application to the domain of cross-cultural digital consumption, specifically in the context of Chinese international students' engagement with the coffee's social media marketing. Unlike conventional applications that treat the central and peripheral routes as largely independent, this research provides empirical evidence that these dual routes operate concurrently and interactively. Social media platforms and campaign quality act as central cues that stimulate higher-order elaboration when users are trust (authenticate) and able to process information. Simultaneously, authenticity and emotional resonance function as peripheral cues, offering heuristic shortcuts that influence less-involved users. The study's incorporation of user engagement and content authenticity as moderators offers a novel extension of ELM. It demonstrates that message effectiveness is contingent on user involvement and the perceived sincerity of the content. These findings offer a more dynamic and integrated view of persuasion, whereby the cognitive and affective dimensions of social media interaction are intertwined. Furthermore, the research challenges the assumption that content alone drives purchase intention, highlighting the necessity of embedding messages within authentic, user-centered, and platform-appropriate structures. This theoretical repositioning of ELM within digital

marketing aligns with recent calls to update classic persuasion models for the realities of algorithm-driven, attention-fragmented environments.

### *5.5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATION*

This study yields several practical implications for marketing practitioners, particularly those operating in dynamic, digitally mediated environments. First, it emphasizes the importance of platform-specific strategies. Social media campaigns should not follow a one-size-fits-all model; instead, they must be tailored to the affordances and user expectations of each platform. For example, visually driven platforms like Instagram or WeChat Channel require aesthetically appealing and emotionally immediate content, while platforms that support more detailed interactions, such as WeChat or Facebook, may benefit from informational depth and contextual storytelling. Second, the findings highlight the pivotal role of content authenticity in influencing consumer behavior through the peripheral route of persuasion. Rather than flooding users with high-frequency, generic content, marketers should craft sincere, transparent, and culturally rich narratives that foster engagement with the platform's users.

Additionally, the study identifies user engagement as a strategic lever in amplifying the effectiveness of social media marketing. Brands should focus on cultivating two-way interactions with consumers through personalized communication, live engagement formats (live stream), and participatory content that deepens psychological involvement and brand trust. Furthermore, the research shows that well-designed, data-driven, and localized campaigns exert greater influence on purchase intention than content volume alone. This suggests that marketers should prioritize quality over quantity, aligning campaign design with users' cultural expectations and behavioral patterns to enhance relevance and impact. Finally, the partial mediating role of customer satisfaction indicates that persuasive marketing alone is insufficient for conversion. To sustain purchase intention, businesses must integrate their digital marketing strategies with broader customer experience initiatives, emphasizing product quality, responsive service, and positive brand interactions to reinforce satisfaction and loyalty.

### *5.6 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTED AREAS FOR RESEARCH*

While this study advances theoretical and practical understanding of digital persuasion, several limitations were acknowledged. Most glocalized marketing context studies focus on the domestic nationals, this research focus on international students in Jiangsu, China to help provide diverse cultural perspectives in the coffee market research. This also enhances the relevance of ELM understanding social media marketing across varied consumer backgrounds. Second, while earlier studies often overlook real-world consumer settings, this study situates its analysis within an actual market context. This study helps bridge the gap between ELM theory and practice in digital marketing research. Despite overcoming some limitations in literature, some areas need further research. The study recommends researchers use longitudinal approaches to better understand changes over time. Additionally, future research should expand to other geographic regions, industries and evolving content formats such as short-form and interactive media to further validate and extend these findings.

## DECLARATION:

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Data Availability: Data is available upon request.

Informed Consent: All participants were duly informed.

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